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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes a joint session held by the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force and the National Advisory Council on Indian Education to hear testimony on issues in urban American Indian education. Issues and problems were in the areas of: (1) the position of Native Americans as a very small minority in large urban schools; (2) lack of funding for Indian programs in urban areas, particularly for vocational education and Head Start; (3) greater severity in urban areas of problems such as high Indian dropout rates; (4) problems of racism and poor racial relations; (5) lack of a tracking system for students who go back and forth between the reservation and family in urban areas; (6) competition with other minority groups for funding and administrative awareness; (7) difficulties in identification of Indian students; (8) the development of Indian gangs in some urban areas; and (9) the need for Native Americans to learn how to influence the "system" at local, state, and federal levels. Also discussed were possible sources of funding for urban Indian education; ways to make that funding more effective; and urban Indian programs that focus on tutoring and remediation, cultural activities, and community networking. (SV)

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INAR/NACIE Joint Issues Sessions
NIEA 22nd Annual Conference - San Diego, California
October 16, 1990

"Urban Indian Education"

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Summary: "Urban Indian Education"

The issue session on Urban Indian Education was hosted by INAR Task Force member David Beaulieau. The following concerns, recommendations, and exemplary programs were discussed:

I. **Overview of the Issues**

- Nearly half of all Indian students in the country are in urban areas, and a vast majority are in public schools. In the area where I come from in the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, the statistics that define what is wrong with Indian education are really extreme to the degree that we think if we were able to solve the problems of Indian education in the city, we'd have them licked statewide. Certainly we are making progress in rural reservation areas, and there is a lot to be done there, but the issues seem to be very extreme in the city. The context is also somewhat different in the city: we typically have very large school districts, and Indians represent a very small percentage of the overall student population. We also have the context of desegregation and the general thrust for minority education in this country being implemented intensely in urban areas. And, of course, we understand that policy is somewhat different than that with which we are familiar in terms of Indian education, because it rests on different political and legal foundations and has a different heritage.

- Most Native Americans live off the reservation; yet many programs are only offered on reservations, especially vocational education. We are often overlooked in the urban areas and cannot apply for other funding.

- Statistics on dropout rates, the number of students in special education, and other related issues always seem to be more severe in urban areas. They also seem more severe among young Indian males than females.

- I have a friend on the reservation who is 19 years old, and he is just a junior in high school. He is in school but it's taking him a while to graduate. I support the idea that boys drop out or lag behind more than girls. My grandmother was the first Indian to graduate from high school in Washington State. All of her granddaughters graduated on time, but some of her grandsons did not graduate.

- Omaha is very unique with two reservations located about 70 miles away; the Omaha Reservation and the Winnebago Reservation. The people from the reservations along the north side of South Dakota are always coming into the urban area. Those are the populations that we have to address. It may sound simplistic, but they're almost like "boat people" when they come in. I can give you one example where a father came in his station wagon. He had lost his wife and had about six children ranging in ages from two to sixteen years old. He worked his way down from South Dakota going from town to town earning

gas and food money. They ended up on our front doorstep in Omaha. I got them a place to stay and provided them food, shelter, and other such things. It's almost as bad as a boat person coming from Southeast Asia.

I've served on the President's Advisory Committee, the Multicultural Education Committee, and our local Title V parent committee. In Omaha we have a working relationship with the superintendent. In fact, when we had our national board meeting in June, we invited him to come and talk to the main board, and he came. The working relationship is all right, but Nebraska is a very conservative state and you have to deal with that. You have to learn to get around it. Sometimes it ends up almost like a cowboy-and-Indian confrontation. We are tying to involve the superintendent in our national conference. We recently hired a new Title V director and we're trying to work with her on our youth substance abuse program. Through her we are also working with the school districts on a dance troupe and basketball teams at the boys' club. We have a continuous struggle with the school district on addressing the minority needs. Even the black and Hispanic children have trouble. It's a continuous hassle.

Also we are dealing with migrant people who are coming back and forth from the reservation. They say we have a very high dropout rate, but the reservation is so close that little Johnny may be staying with his grandmother part of the year and coming back to Omaha the other part. There is no tracking system, and he may be going back and forth to South Dakota.

There is just not enough money available for the Indian program. They've got a full-time, underpaid coordinator and a half-time counselor. The half-time counselor is so swamped that she has to go out into the community almost all the time. And then if she isn't Indian, people are not going to let her into the house. There are some white counselors making $40,000 a year and it's really a sad situation. You just really have to go to Omaha to get a feel for how things are. The dominant system is more willing to serve the blacks or the Hispanics than the Indian people. Other groups feel sorry for us so once in a while we have to link up with those other groups to get something done.

The general assumption is that just because a person moves away to an urban area, he or she has a good job and doesn't have any problems or needs. However, the needs are just as bad or even worse because you also have racism and discrimination to deal with. There is really a need for programs for our young. Our preschool children are the ones who are really being lost in the urban area. It took one tribe four years to get a preschool program. I don't know when Head Start comes up for reauthorization. It's already written in Head Start that tribes are eligible to have a Head Start program, but urban Indian organizations cannot have Head Start programs. That is where we are facing a problem. Drug and alcohol abuse programs are willing to give X amount of dollars to Indian programs, but Head Start is not. Tribal programs have Region VI through set-asides, but urban Indian organizations do not have that opportunity. We can continue to go after JOM and Title V, but those funds are so small that they just don't address all of our needs.

My final request is that urban Indian organizations and Indian centers should not be forgotten or neglected. I've sat as an administrator for a tribe, and there wasn't a two or three day period when an RFP didn't come across my desk. All I had to do was see if it was

feasible and then go after that money. When you're out running an urban center, those RFPs don't come across your desk. You're out there hustling just like the black, Hispanic, or Asian minorities, and so it's very competitive. Furthermore, those people are experts, while we are barely getting started. What I am saying is that the urban organizations need to be given a level playing field so we can compete with anyone.

- Many Indian students leave the reservations or their Native communities to go to school or find jobs elsewhere. This is something I've done myself. I'm a Laguna Pueblo Indian and I live in Oklahoma, so I feel like I'm out of my element. I live there because that is where my job is. I feel like we need to return to our home communities and work to establish those things we have learned elsewhere. I feel that as soon as I could go back, if I had the opportunity, I would return to my Native land. I feel that is real important because I see many Indian students who leave their homeland and don't ever return.

II. Funding

Sources of Funds

- There are a number of sources of dollars available specifically for urban Indians. We have Indian Education Act monies, Title V entitlement, that come to urban areas. We also have other federal programs that are generally available to all other students. Indians are a part of the population that generates eligibility for those funds. Certain urban areas receive Johnson O'Malley dollars. Those are dollars that are contracted by tribal governments to school districts. There are certain requirements for schools to receive JOM, funding including being on or near a reservation. The BIA recently defined Minneapolis as being on or near a reservation so we now have a JOM contract. There are certain urban areas that, by their location and proximity to reservations, also receive Impact Aid money. These are not specifically for Indians, although they may be tied up in the regulations that require tribal and parental input into the expenditure of those dollars.

  In Minnesota and in other areas, state dollars are specifically set aside for Indians. In Minnesota we have state grant programs for Indian education. One is in language and culture education; the other is for high school postsecondary preparation programs which are exclusively for American Indian students and are offered on a competitive basis.

- Indians are eligible for Title VII--the Bilingual Education Act. Some urban areas with significantly large populations of Indian students, such as Albuquerque and Phoenix, have separate Title VII bilingual education programs. These funds are for bilingual or multicultural education and can be used for staff development, so that is an area that people need to start urging their schools to look into.

Problems

- One of the things that urban Indians face is the numbers game. We have about 5,000 Indians in Omaha in comparison to New Mexico, Oklahoma, California, and Arizona, which have hundreds of thousands. When the funding agencies start looking at proposals, they still go with the numbers, because that's the way the system works. How are these dollars going

to be effective? They are going to be more effective addressing 100,000 instead of 5,000. The numbers preference is true with the foundations and churches, but I also think it probably applies to Title V and JOM.

- Whenever we get into monies that aren't specifically set aside for Native Americans, the purse string is controlled by the dominant entity--which is probably the state--and there is very little input from the Native American population. Because the Native American population does not interact with those entities controlling monies which are not specifically designated to include Native Americans, Native Americans can be brushed aside. Furthermore, there is no confirmation that Native Americans are being served by these funds other than by having the programs indicate that they have satisfied the regulations and requirements requested on paper. There needs to be an agency to confirm that Native Americans are a part of those programs.

  Title V monies are treated like state-owned funds and they are controlled through the school board. Although they may say X number of minorities participate in it, we need some way to confirm what is taking place, especially as it concerns the urban areas. At the moment they simply satisfy the guidelines and the paperwork, and there is no other confirmation.

- When you do not specifically earmark monies for Native Americans, and when Native Americans are expected to go out and penetrate the political machine, it's stymied from the beginning. School boards may be responsive to the dominant group depending on the locale--in San Francisco it is Orientals, in Chicago it is blacks. Our concern is that the numbers of Native Americans are not great. We know it's a numbers game and if you don't earmark those monies for Native Americans, they won't get their fair share.

- Certain federal programs do have set-asides but I think we are going to have to go one step further. Tribes have treaties with the United States government and so they have clout in Washington. I know they can get a lot of things done just by asking. But we also have the urban Indian. The system says that the BIA and IHS are going to take care of urban Indians, but the BIA and IHS say that the tribes are their priorities and thus the tribes will get all of the money. They are starting to provide urban programs--IHS has urban projects and BIA has JOM and Title V--but you can almost count on one hand the programs urban Indian people are eligible for from Washington, ANA, and JTPA. You almost have to have set-asides within those Indian programs. It doesn't even have to be written in as long as people understand that we are Indians regardless of where we live. When I was on the council in Oklahoma, those Indians living in Oklahoma City or Tulsa were part of our tribe, and I tried to make scholarship monies available for the people who lived there.

III. Educational Programs

Recommendations

- I'm the JOM chairperson for Claremore schools in Claremore, Oklahoma. We primarily serve a suburban school district. We should have some sort of Indian education program at the state level to serve Indian students. A large majority of our students are Cherokee, but we do have students from all different tribes and from all parts of the country, and we don't

have any formal type of instruction for these students. The only Indian education program we have is funded through JOM, and the instructors are recruited on either a voluntary basis or on contract. Most of those programs are primarily directed toward arts and crafts, but I feel that leadership skills, political issues, and history need to be taught to our children because these urban and suburban students are losing their sense of our culture rapidly.

States need to be more open to the fact that we do need Indian education programs, especially where there are large numbers of Indian students in their classrooms. I don't feel as though our school system is willing to deal with Indian programs right now.

We have not established a way to incorporate Indian studies in the school system as a whole. The JOM program does implement some cultural activities, but they are strictly related to arts and crafts. Our parent committee was newly incorporated last July, so we have not really established any groundwork to implement programs with the school board. Our school wanted to eliminate the JOM program because it was administratively burdensome, so we already feel that there is going to be a little bit of animosity towards us if we request any changes. I think there is mild hostility but I think it can be resolved. I think we just have to go through different avenues to do so. It would help if we had some sort of backup from Indian education agencies saying that states serving Indian students need to provide at least a day or so of Indian education a week.

- Because of my interest in dance, performing arts, and creative arts, I was encouraged in the 1970s to go back to school so I could participate in Indian education in urban areas. Hopefully, Indian youth have an experiential love for arts and crafts, music, and movement and that it is a part of who they are. But they're trying to discover who they are in a new urban setting. I think we need to reach out and find out the interests of students. It's not always money that we need. We must see what we can offer in new ways to our youth in terms of the activities that speak to their tradition in urban settings.

- Because there are different agencies that provide services to American Indians, we are visualizing a consolidation of those services or an intertribal or interagency group so that we are not in competition. We also have one agency that does preview the Federal Register for us.

Existing Programs

- I'm associated with the Intertribal Friendship House. The Native American population within Oakland is very minor, and consequently they tend to keep a low profile. In Oakland, they don't actually have a community itself; they live interspersed with other ethnic groups like the Cambodian, and Laotian people that came over on boats. The schools themselves are overpopulated with minorities from different ethnic groups so it is somewhat hard to bring the Indian community members together. Programs in which other ethnic groups participate tend to be diluted and break apart.

Oakland public schools have a summer school program; all of the Indian students who need help attend, earn credit towards graduation, and do well. It carries them over; it's a bridge for the following year. They have high participation in the summer school. On the other hand, when tutoring activities are diluted by other ethnic groups, participation is low, or they

break up. These are some of the urban problems that occur when the Indian population is somewhat insignificant.

The summer program is funded through Title V. However, I think that is being depleted this year, and there is a possibility that we might not continue the summer program. The tutoring program, which the agency is picking up, doesn't have any money, but we're going ahead to try to consolidate a program. We rely on other agencies in Oakland for funding.

The Intertribal Friendship House does not have any direct contact with the Oakland public schools. We are trying to establish a partnership with the school district so that we can in cooperate in some kind of funding program.

Although the Santa Barbara Urban Indian Health Project doesn't have funds, we decided to contact the families and encourage them to call school counselors if they had concerns about students' grades. We have children starting to come for afterschool counseling, and the staff salary is coming from some other funding source. We are going to tutor students and prove that there is an Indian community.

In order to encourage our junior and senior high school students, we're going to look into junior achievement clubs. They have nothing whatsoever to do with Indian programs in our school district but could be a source to bolster community relations and community networking. That is the route we're going to try to keep kids interested in staying in school and to give them something related to their personal interests.

Title V

I am a project specialist for Title V Indian education program in the San Lorenzo School District, an urban area. As a group we feel we are academically deficient, but through the Title V programs the students do improve. There are 35 different tribes in our districts; we want to be recognized as Indians and as a valuable part of this nation. We don't want to be identified as Anglo. Districts do recognize the need for Indian education, but small districts are strapped financially. Educational costs in California are three times higher than in other areas across the nation. It's important to mainstream, to fit in global education and multiethnicity, but we should recognize Native Americans as their own group.

San Lorenzo has a computer program that we are going to hook up with Educational Native American Network (ENAN) out of Northern University. ENAN has told us that they will pay for all costs of the computer program, and we will supply the modem so that we can hook up with the university to communicate with our Indian parents, administrators, students, and staff. This is a project that we're very excited about. We will share information and any educational tools that we have.

We want to continue to be Native Americans, whether it's in an urban or reservation setting, and hopefully we will continue to do so both academically and culturally through the Title V programs.

Two percent of the student body in the San Lorenzo School District is Native American. The San Francisco Bay Area (especially the San Francisco schools) have 6,000 newcomers from

Europe and Asia a year, and so our district has 500 new LEP students right now. The area has an over 50 percent minority population. There are plans to create committees to deal with the minority backgrounds. I have an Indian museum and resource center and have just recently trained 27 school teachers on Native American culture, history, and education, especially Title V.

The Title V project I am involved in as a student performed at an A's game. The active members got buckskin dresses that are worth $1,000 or more. I've been involved for about five or six years. When I was younger we used to bead. We do a lot of things and it's really important to me. It's special. In the San Lorenzo School District there are two high schools, Royal High School and San Lorenzo High School. I know all the people from Royal High, but there are not many people who are active and participate from San Lorenzo High. We do a lot of things, and we have fieldtrips. We get together on Christmas and we exchange gifts and sing songs.

- Someone said that there was a problem with the parents getting their children involved in school activities. However, right now I see no problem. My dad doesn't like me going to the powwows because he likes to stay at home, but my mom is involved. My mom is the chairperson for the parent committee in the districts and so she tries to keep involved. I don't really know how parents can get involved; it's mainly up to the student.

Identification Issues

- One of the things that prohibits participation in programs is the identification of Indian students. You have these 506 forms that need to be filled out before they are recognized. I have to carry around a card identifying me as a Creek Indian and that bothers me. It's really a problem of identifying those Indian children for whom these monies can be appropriated. If there hasn't been a 506 form made out on a student, as I understand it, he or she will be identified either as Filipino or Hispanic rather than American Indian.

- The Santa Barbara Urban Indian Health Project, is just beginning an outreach program to try to meet the needs of our Indian population in the schools. Title VII uses the home language survey, and the computer will only select one ethnicity. Maybe a child is American Indian and Hispanic, but the district personnel make no attempt to assist a parent in determining which group they choose to identify as. We have nothing in our area to encourage families to identify as Indian so we are starting traditional drumming, dancing, and singing and hope to have a mini-powwow in our area. We don't have a Title V program because the school district didn't have it, but we hope to get Title V monies by next spring, which may come through to us as a community agency.

III. Indian Gangs

- Nobody has addressed the development of Indian gangs in urban areas. In Minneapolis we have organized Indian gangs that are competing with black and Hispanic gangs. There was a woman who testified in one of the other sessions about the development of Indian gang activity in Tucson.

- I attended a parent meeting at the Intertribal Friendship House and they brought in some police officers addressing that very question. American Indian gangs are not in the immediate area, but they do join other gangs. There is no imminent danger of having Indian gangs in the near future. That was somewhat of an issue for us as we were wondering where the dropouts went and if they were disappearing into gangs. That is one issue we would like to address with the school district as well.

- We have a different kind of gang problem in Omaha. The Bloods and the Cripps are in Omaha and the young Indian children join them. We've had a couple of cases where they try to drop out of the gang, but those Cripps say the only way to go out is if we kill you. The Indians had to move back to the reservation just to get away. The Indian population is not large enough for the Indian students to actually run in gangs.

  This all relates to the central issue of funding. Every summer we have softball teams and we come up with some money to buy them cheap uniforms of T-shirts with a name on it. The parents bring the girls to practice and to ball games. The boys are going through another organization this year, but we're going to buy them uniforms. They won't be the most expensive, but we will pay their registration and it will keep some of those Indian teenagers off the street.

  If we had a grant to address teenage youth, we would be able to have a counselor to go out there hustling and bring them in. It always goes back to the person who is running the program and whether or not he or she is dedicated to put in the extra effort. Committed people are out there, but they also have to make a living. It's hard to come up with something unless you actually have some money.

IV. Influencing the System

- You are asking us to try to influence a curriculum, but the body we must travel through is political. Until now, Native Americans have resisted the intermeshing of Indian culture with the dominant society which is done through the political process. Title V monies aren't being properly used due to the fact that Native Americans do not intermesh with the political system. The school boards are political. I've heard that argument raised in every session I've attended. But I'm also going to say the same thing I said in those sessions. When there is no political intermeshing between Native Americans and the school boards, the Native American eliminates the possibility of influencing the curricula of the subjects being taught.

  Instead of labeling total monies under minority, I would suggest that you define X number of dollars for Native Americans and that Native Americans have a say as to how that money is allocated. Speaking from a Comanche perspective, I would suggest that Comanche history be taught, without a yes or no from the school board. I would also like to see the tribal entity have responsibility for setting the qualifications of who teaches Comanche history. If the state gets hold of the program, the first thing they will say is that "you are not qualified to teach," and consequently the program will not go anywhere. When you start to suggest these things, element after element comes into play. Native Americans must be in control rather than go through the political body that we must go through to take advantage of programs the way they exist now.

Tribal leaders do not have a lot of clout when they go to Washington, DC. There is no mechanism for tribal leaders to function as sovereign nations on a government-to-government level. If the chairs from every group decide an issue can't be solved, they load up and go to Washington on their own initiative. Whether or not they're granted an audience there with the proper people is questionable, but that's the way business has been conducted since they put our people on reservations. We need to get a mechanism in place where we can deal on a government-to-government level. We're through with Indian agents. If we're talking sovereignty, let's deal sovereignty. Until we get that mechanism in place, we're always going to be dealing at this level where we have to come to these kinds of committees to get our problems solved.